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News Release

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Federal judge convicts Rolling 30's Bloods gang member of conspiracy to distribute crack cocaine, possession of firearms

A long-term member of the Rolling 30's Bloods, a south Minneapolis street gang, was convicted last week for his role in a conspiracy to distribute crack cocaine and to possess firearms for the past 15 years.

After an eight-day non-jury trial, United States District Court Judge Donovan Frank convicted Joe Darrell Edwards, Jr., also known as Jodebe, on one count of conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute 50 or more grams of cocaine base, commonly known as crack cocaine, between 1992 and 2007; and one count of conspiracy to possess firearms during and in relation to a drug-trafficking crime between 1992 and 2007.

Edwards, 37, Minneapolis, was convicted Sept. 5 in federal court in Minneapolis. Edwards was indicted on Aug. 22, 2007, along with 11 others. The U.S. Attorney's Office has also prosecuted several other gang members in separate cases during the past several years. More than 40 witnesses testified at the trial, including several gang members.

"The indictment and conviction of Joe Darrell Edwards, Jr. is significant to the safety of citizens in Minneapolis," said Valerie Wurster, deputy chief of investigations for the Minneapolis Police Department. "The ongoing collaboration and hard work of the Gang Strike Task Force and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives is essential to this success. I would like to thank our federal partners, and applaud the skill and hard work of all the officers involved."

According to court documents, the Rolling 30's Bloods gang operates within a neighborhood of south Minneapolis encompassing those blocks that are numbered in the 30's, and the gang's territory is bordered at the northern edge by Lake Street; at the southern edge by approximately 42nd Street; at the eastern edge by approximately Nicollet Avenue; and at the western edge by approximately Bloomington or Elliot avenues. The neighborhood is primarily residential, with some small commercial developments.

“The primary purpose for establishing the territory of the Rolling 30's Blood was to control the sale of drugs within their territory to the exclusion of all others, including rival gangs,” Judge Frank wrote in his ruling. “Selling crack cocaine was a routine event, and became a primary purpose and activity of the gang.”

Four Rolling 30's gang members testified that anyone else selling drugs in their territory would be robbed or shot, and that there was an agreement among the members to help each other prosper, specifically with relation to drug sales and loaning each other guns.

Edwards originally joined the gang in 1983, when he was age 12, and is considered one of the more “respected” members of the gang. Witnesses testified that Edwards is at the highest level of gang membership and can sit back and reap the benefits from protection of the territory.

According to court testimony, the gang members would sell drugs, particularly at certain intersections within the neighborhood, in small amounts such as one or two rocks of crack cocaine at a time. The exchanges were brief hand-to-hand encounters between a customer who either walks up to or drives up to a gang member on the street.

Witnesses also testified that gang members carried smaller amounts of crack cocaine because if they were caught, they could claim to be users and not be charged with distribution.

The Court heard testimony that gang members obtained guns in a variety of ways, including by trading drugs for guns and by stealing guns. Witnesses also testified that the gang members had an agreement to have guns available to them during their drug-trafficking activities.

Witnesses testified that Edwards had dealt crack cocaine within the last five years, that Edwards bought drugs and possessed drugs; that Edwards is known to set up a deal to buy drugs, but instead steals them; that Edwards was supplied with drugs in August 2007, shortly after he was released from state prison; and that Edwards participated in the conspiracy while incarcerated.

Both gang and police witnesses testified that they had seen Edwards with a .32 Magnum on more than one occasion.

Judge Frank will determine Edwards’s sentence at a future date. This case is the result of an investigation by the Minneapolis Police Department, the Minnesota Gang Strike Force, the Minnesota Department of Corrections and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. It was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys David P. Steinkamp and Steven L. Schleicher.

This case is part of Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN), a comprehensive, strategic approach to reducing gun crime in America that was launched in 2001. It networks existing local programs that target gun crime and provides them with additional tools in the effort to make our streets and communities a much more safe place.